



U.S. Department
of Transportation
National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration

NEWS

NON

Volume 7, No. 11

September 17, 2001

Seat Belt Use Reaches Historic High *Airbag-Related Child Fatality Rate Drops Dramatically*

By Sandy Sinclair,
Traffic Safety Programs

August 30, 2001. Washington, DC. As nationwide seat belt use continued its steady upward trend last year—reaching its highest level since the federal government began conducting regular national surveys in 1994—the number of airbag-related child fatalities continued to decline dramatically.

NHTSA Administrator, Dr. Jeffrey W. Runge announced the latest statistics on seat belt use at a news conference sponsored jointly by NHTSA and the Air Bag & Seat Belt Safety Campaign (AB&SBSC). Carol Carmody, Acting Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board and Chuck Hurley, AB&SBSC Executive Director, joined him at the event.

The new data—drawn from a large-scale observational study conducted by NHTSA in June 2001—show a 2 percentage-point increase in seat belt use to 73 percent in less than one year. The study, known as the National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS), is conducted periodically by the agency to obtain nationwide estimates of shoulder belt use and to support the agency's motor vehicle occupant protection programs. The last such survey was conducted in the fall of 2000, revealing a rate of 71 percent.

"The challenge of increasing seat belt use on our roadways is a critically important one. These new statistics are a very encouraging sign that we're moving in the right direction on belt use," Dr. Runge said. NHTSA estimates that the combination of an air bag plus a lap/shoulder belt reduces the risk of serious head injury by 81 percent compared with a 60 percent reduction for belts alone.

Other key NOPUS findings include:

- Overall, passengers are no longer significantly less likely to buckle up than are drivers.
- Overall for the nation, more pickup truck occupants are buckling up—the rate rose



from 59 to 62 percent.

- Seat belt use rates continue to grow in states with stronger enforcement laws. Seat belt use has reached 78 percent in states with primary enforcement and 67 percent in states with secondary enforcement.

At the same event, tremendous progress was announced in protecting children from airbag-related injuries and fatalities. According to government highway safety data included in a report released at the event by the AB&SBSC, the rate of child deaths from air bags declined a remarkable 90.3 percent between 1996 and 2000. The rate declined dramatically despite a threefold increase in the number of passenger air bags on the road.

Dr. Runge praised the leadership and supporters of the AB&SBSC, and singled out local grassroots organizations and thousands of law enforcement agencies from coast to coast for their tireless efforts on behalf of children.

The AB&SBSC will continue its work to reach owners of air bag equipped vehicles with the ABCs of air bag safety:

- Always slide the seat back and sit back!
- Buckle everyone!
- Children in back! ■

National Medical Association and Meharry Medical College Announce Partnership

By Laurie Flaherty,
Traffic Safety Programs

August 6, 2001. Nashville, TN. The National Medical Association (NMA) and the Department of Occupational and Preventive Medicine (DOPM) at Meharry Medical College announced a landmark partnership to reduce injury and death among African Americans due to traffic crashes. The partnership will seek to accomplish both organization's goals and objectives as outlined in the Meharry report, "Achieving a Credible Health and Safety Approach To Increasing Seat Belt Use Among African Americans" and the NMA position statement entitled, "The Role of the

African American Physician in Reducing Traffic-Related Injury and Death Among African Americans." This position statement was developed as part of a cooperative agreement between NMA and NHTSA's Office of Communications and Outreach.

The NMA will assist Meharry's DOPM in conducting its research by offering access to its extensive national, regional, state, and local network of over 25,000 African American physicians and the patients they serve. In addition, the NMA will publish the results and scholarly articles generated by the DOPM research project in *The Journal of the National Medical Association*, the NMA peer-reviewed

Continued on p. 2

National Medical Association and Meharry Medical College Announce Partnership

Continued from p. 1

medical journal, which has been under continuous publication since 1909, and *NMA News*, the official newsmagazine of the NMA. NMA will also assist with technical assistance to support Meharry efforts.

The NMA relationship with NHTSA will result in the development of materials to educate the African American community in their doctor's office. The DOPM will provide technical assistance on the development of such materials. The DOPM will also provide NMA with relevant research findings and existing materials developed by the DOPM that may be used in the development of NMA materials. In addition, the NMA and the DOPM will work together to develop programs, materials, and campaigns on traffic safety in the African American community based on the results of both organizations' efforts. The NMA and the DOPM will also seek to develop collaborative projects around other areas of unintentional and intentional injury that disproportionately impact African Americans and other underserved populations.

NMA and Meharry Medical College share a legacy of over one hundred years of excellence in medicine in the African American community. The National Medical Association is a national professional and scientific organization representing the interests of more than 25,000 African American physicians and their patients. Meharry Medical College is the largest private, historically black institution exclusively dedicated to educating health care professionals and biomedical scientists in the United States.

The National Medical Association (NMA) has targeted four issues to address within the African American community as it relates to

traffic safety: seat belt use, child safety seat use, impaired driving, and pedestrian safety. They plan to address these issues with three strategies: 1) development of materials for use by physicians in counseling patients on a one-to-one basis. 2) development of physicians as media spokespersons to deliver traffic safety message to the African American community,

and 3) use of any and all public education materials developed by NHTSA which target the African American, community. They intend to work with NHTSA, and its regional offices to deliver the traffic safety message to the African American community. To find the NMA representative in your community, contact Mr. Chaka Burgess, at NMA headquarters, at (202) 374-1895, ext. 232 or chaka@nmanet.org. For more information on the NHTSA/NMA cooperative agreement, contact Laurie Flaherty, in the Office of Communications & Outreach, at (202) 366-2705 or lflaherty@nhtsa.dot.gov. ■



NMA and Meharry Medical College announce partnership for traffic safety. Pictured are (L to R): Dr. Wayne Moore, Chief of Emergency Medicine, Meharry Medical College; Dr. John Maupin, President of Meharry Medical College; Dr. Lucille Perez, President-Elect, NMA; Dr. Rodney Hood, President, NMA; and Dr. Fernando Daniels III, Chair, NMA Emergency Medicine Section.

“Color Me Healthy” Calendar Enriches the Lives of South Dakota Youth

“Color Me Healthy” is a creative calendar designed to promote and enrich the lives of South Dakota youth. Through the student's depiction of healthy living, the Department of Education and Cultural Affairs (DECA), the Office of Comprehensive Services of Health, and the Office of Health Promotion have developed this teaching calendar for all classrooms grades K–6.

The calendar is designed to encourage healthy behaviors and provide the teacher with information on local and national materials and resources. The focus is on the following six health behavior areas:

- Good nutrition
- Regular physical activity
- Tobacco use prevention
- Alcohol and other drug use prevention
- HIV/AIDS awareness
- Injury prevention

The month of August featured artwork by Cassi Quale, grade 4, Summit School, Summit South Dakota. Way to go Cassi for educating your fellow students and teachers about the importance of wearing a seat belt! ■



Secretary Mineta Encourages Presidential Classroom Students to Consider Transportation Careers



by Catherine McCullough,
Research and Development

Monday, June 25, 2001. Washington, DC. Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta recently delivered the keynote address for Presidential Classroom's Seminar on the Executive Branch. The Secretary spoke before approximately 400 students, their volunteer instructors, and Presidential Classroom interns as part of Media and Democracy Week.

The Secretary spoke about leadership and what it takes to be a great leader. He encouraged the students to take responsibility and to make contributions to ensure that the United States continues to be a great country to live in for all Americans.

The Secretary related how he and his family, along with 120,000 other Americans of Japanese ancestry were forced into internment camps during World War II. He felt that this happened because there were few people in the national political leadership at that time who knew who they were. They were simply not trusted because of their race. After they were released, one of the community leaders, Mr. Ishimatsu, encouraged young people to get involved in politics so that people would know who they were. Secretary Mineta was one of those young people.

The Secretary indicated that Mr. Ishimatsu was a great mentor to him and he always appreciated his guidance. He encouraged the students to find a mentor—someone they admire and who can help them find the opportunities that await them—to take advantage of those opportunities when they present themselves. He reminded them to get involved and that by getting involved, they can make a difference.

He also spoke about how fascinating his job as Secretary of Transportation is, overseeing a staff of approximately 100,000 employees and a budget of \$59 billion. He explained that the Department is responsible for establishing the regulations and guidelines to make all modes of transportation safer and more efficient. He related how satisfying it was to see the results of the work of his staff everyday, everywhere. "The job of keeping our transportation system world class is one that's never done, but it's one that is incredibly fulfilling. It is one of the few jobs in this information age in which you get to see the fruits of your labor—whether it's an expanded subway system, a repaired bridge, a new bike path, or a larger port." He recommended a career in transportation to anyone who may be considering it, so they too could one day: watch a plane take off and know they were responsible in making sure it took off on time and safely; ride down an interstate highway and know that they had a role in building it; or

count the number of lives saved by the successful execution of a Coast Guard search and rescue mission or by promoting the use of safety belts.

The Secretary answered questions from the students on his career and on a variety of programs of the Department.

Catherine McCullough from NHTSA's Office of Human Centered Research, CIREN, was a volunteer instructor for this Media and Democracy Week. Several other former Departmental staff members also served as volunteer instructors. They included Kathie Klass, formerly NHTSA's Director of Consumer Affairs, and Kimberly J. Waggoner, formerly with FHWA and OST (now working

with CDC in Atlanta).

The Classroom began in the White House during the administration of President John F. Kennedy. President Kennedy challenged the nation's youth to public service and sponsored two pilot programs: Widening Horizons and the White House Seminars. During Lyndon Johnson's presidency, Vice President Hubert Humphrey led the Washington Briefings, a continuation of President Kennedy's original concept. The program outgrew its early boundaries, and the original blueprint was transferred from the White House to a board of directors of prominent educators and citizens. In 1969, the organization took on a new name: A Presidential Classroom for Young Americans, a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization. A Presidential Classroom for Young Americans is an educational program in government. Additional information is available on their web site at www.presidentialclassroom.org. ■

MADD, Nationwide Insurance and Police Launch National Sobriety Checkpoint Crackdown On Impaired Drivers

August 29, 2001. Columbus, Ohio. On the eve of the heavily-traveled and high risk driving Labor Day holiday weekend, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Nationwide Insurance and the nation's police chiefs held a news conference and sobriety checkpoint to kickoff a national enforcement and education holiday campaign to combat drunk driving—America's most frequent violent crime.

NHTSA Administrator Dr. Jeffrey Runge, a featured speaker at the news conference, said, "Impaired driving is no accident. It is a very serious crime that has devastating outcomes."

The National Safety Council predicted that 474 Americans would die in crashes over the

Labor Day period with 50 percent (237) involving alcohol. A new insurance industry report indicates that sobriety checkpoints are perhaps the most effective law enforcement tool to combat drunk driving, yet they are highly underused.

Preliminary statistics show that last year, for the first time in 5 years, alcohol-related crash deaths rose in the U.S.

The event also marked the 4th anniversary of Princess Diana's death by emphasizing that the U.S. DUI death toll last year was the same as 1997, and that 64,000 Americans have died and approximately 2,520,000 were injured in DUI crashes since her death. ■



Back to School Bash Visitors in South Carolina Learn About Auto Safety

By Gene Luke,
Office of Defects Investigator

July 28, 2001. South Carolina State Fairgrounds. The Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) teamed up with the South Carolina



Department of Transportation (SCDOT) to promote the DOT Auto Safety Hotline at the annual Back to School Bash held at the South Carolina State Fairgrounds. This was the 5th anniversary of the Bash, which targets children from kindergarten to 12th grade. Approximately 20,000 people turned out for the July 28th event hosted by WIS Television.

ODI has a unique aspect of its Hotline outreach program in which it delivers not only promotional literature but also a full-sized exhibit to organizations throughout the country for safety fairs and other types of events. SCDOT learned of the program through the Hotline web site and felt it was a great opportunity to promote highway safety.



Employees from SCDOT volunteered to work at the event. They developed a series of exhibits beginning with a 24' x 24' traffic safety exhibit. The exhibit included miniature traffic safety signs, a traffic signal, work zone cones, road markings, and bridge signs. The



exhibit allowed the children and their parents to drive through the animated school zones and pedestrian areas seeing a playground and schoolhouse. They then parked in an area for child passenger safety to make sure they were



big enough for an adult seat belt. A second area of the exhibit included computers and interactive CDs that allowed children and adults to take traffic safety tests and learn about bicycle and pedestrian safety. The last stop was the Hotline exhibit, where literature and promotional items such as bumper stickers were available for everyone to take home. ■



National Walk to School Day

By Matthew MW Morrell,
Traffic Safety Programs

Tuesday October 2nd, 2001 is **National Walk to School Day**, an exciting day for students, parents, teachers, and community leaders across the United States and the world. **National Walk to School Day** is an event with the purpose of bringing the people of a community together by walking its students to school. Last year, hundreds of thousands participated in this event in the United States alone.

The event was started in Great Britain in 1994 and has gained worldwide popularity since then. In 1997, the Partnership for a Walkable America launched the first walk in the United States in Chicago, which was followed later in the year by a walk in Los Angeles. In the year 2000, **National Walk to School Day** became an international event, where children in the United States joined other children in the world to walk to school on the same day. Over two and a half million walkers from 9 countries were estimated to have joined forces in this worldwide event. This year, **National Walk to School Day** is expected to be even more exciting and popular as 17 countries have already signed up to participate.

National Walk to School Day is more than just a community joining together one day for a walk to school. Every walk has a certain mission or goal for the benefit of the school children and the members of the community. These include encouraging physical fitness; teaching children good safety skills as pedestrians; raising concern for the environment; reducing traffic congestion, pollution, and speed near schools; and creating awareness of how walkable a community is.

For those of you who want to get involved in this event, check with your children and local schools to see if they are involved in **National Walk to School Day**. If not, see what you and your child can do to make this event happen. For more information on this event and how to register a school, log onto www.walktoschool-usa.org. All it takes to make a difference is a little effort. Mark Tuesday, October 2nd, 2001 on your calendar and plan to participate in **National Walk to School Day** which promises to be a fun-filled day of interaction with your children, your community, and the rest of the world. ■

NHTSA Now is an official publication of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Office of Public and Consumer Affairs.

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QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Leaders think and talk about the solutions. Followers think and talk about the problems.”

—**Brian Tracy, American Trainer, Speaker, Author, Businessman**